STATUS OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNDER STATE WAGE PAYMENT AND WAGE COLLECTION LEGISLATION

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A. Economic need of wage earners for frequent payment of wages and for wage collection machinery.

For the great number of wage earners who are completely dependent upon their pay envelopes, it is essential that they receive their pay regularly at comparatively short intervals. Yet, it is not uncommon that employers pay wages at long intervals, or withhold them for considerable lengths of time, or even fail to pay them in full. In many cases wages are paid partly in cash and partly in kind. To the resident industrial worker and his family, the loss of a week's wages may bring want and privation, or keep them dependent on credit furnished by the independent or company store, or on loans from local money lenders. To the seasonal agricultural worker and his family, delay or failure to pay wages may result not only in such consequences, but also in their being hopelessly stranded and unable to return to their point of origin. 1/

Every year many thousands of workers are denied wages owing to them for work done. Generally, in such cases, the wage earner finds the prevailing legal machinery inadequate to help him secure satisfaction from the employer. Redress through civil litigation is slow, cumbersome and expensive.

1/ Delay and failure to pay wages were some of the reasons why many of the Dust Bowl migrants, who were recruited to pick cotton in New Mexico in 1936, were unable to return to their homes. Cf. C. E. Hazard, Labor Relations Representative of the Farm Security Administration, "Narrative Report of Farm Labor in Region XII," March 1938.

Several States have enacted laws to help unpaid workers secure justice in the same way as the workmen's compensation laws provide for the compensation of workmen in case of industrial accidents. In a great many communities legal-aid societies have been instrumental in helping workers collect their unpaid wages. These societies provide legal advice and assistance to persons who cannot afford to employ a lawyer in civil suits. During the ten-year period 1924-1933, over 20 percent of the cases coming to legal-aid organizations were in the field of wage claims.[1/] Although workers are often ignorant of their existence, legal-aid societies are found in about 64 cities in 30 States and in the District of Columbia. In addition to legal-aid societies, small claims courts, or justices of the peace (in rural regions) exist in 16 States, though not in every city or town in those States.[2/]

1/ U. S. Department of Labor, "Growth of Legal-Aid Work in the United States," Bulletin No. 607, 1936, Table 2, p. 67.

2/ Division of Labor Standards, U. S. Department of Labor, pamphlet on "Collection of Back Wages."

B. The problem of wage payment and wage collection affecting agricultural workers.

Considerable evidence exists throughout the country of farm workers being deprived of wages owing to them for work done. In some cases, seasonal workers in agriculture are not paid until all other obligations of the farmers are taken care of. In other cases, wages are withheld to insure that workers remain until the close of the harvest season. Low prices of farm products and crop failures have been given as causes for delay in payment or for failure to pay at all. Often, employers out of sheer unscrupulousness, refuse to live up to their obligations to their employees. Often, because of the eagerness for employment, the workers fail to come to an understanding as to the amount they are to be paid. Many legitimate wage claims are never pressed because of fear of retaliation. In many States, lack of civil rights has handicapped Negro, Mexican, Spanish-American and Filipino workers in taking advantage of legal means to obtain satisfaction.

For a great many years low wages have been the cause for extremely inadequate standards of living of seasonal workers in the sugar beet fields of Wyoming, Colorado and Michigan. In recent years these standards have been reduced still further because of the difficulty which workers have had in collecting wages due them. In the Colorado,

Wyoming and other Rocky Mountain beet-growing areas, workers are often denied the full amount of wages stipulated in the contract, because many of the farmers are often obliged to apply the entire income against mortgages, so that little or nothing remains for wages. In northern Wyoming and in the Western Slope area of Colorado, payment of wages only three times during the year compels beet workers, who cannot obtain credit from independent stores, to rely on commodity advances of the sugar companies. This custom of relying on company store credit was used by local relief agencies in some communities of these regions, during the 1934 season, to deny relief to families. It was argued by the relief agencies that beet workers should obtain credit against their next season's beet earnings instead of applying for relief.1/

In Wyoming, mortgage foreclosures on beet farms caused farmers to fail to pay workers their full wages. This was given as the cause for paying beet workers only for the thinning and hoeing operations performed during the 1937 growing season, and that only in part. They were not paid for topping operations at harvest time, and, in addition,

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1/ U. S. Department of Labor, "Preliminary Report of the Secretary of Labor Pursuant to a Resolution (S. Res. 298) to Make Certain Investigations Concerning the Social and Economic Needs of Laborers Migrating Across State Lines," 75th Congress, First Session, Vol. II, 1938, p. 238.

were not paid the customary dollar per acre hold-back[1] due them for thinning and hoeing.[2]

In Michigan, beet growers often complain that good native labor is not available, and use this as an excuse for importing Mexican labor. It is well known, however, that beet farmers and sugar beet processing companies prefer to employ Mexicans because, among other reasons, they can be defrauded of their just wages more easily than can native workers. On the other hand, one of the reasons why native Michigan labor refuses to work in the sugar beet fields of the State is the sharp practices of the growers and processors in paying less wages than workers earn. Michigan beet growers have been known to abandon land under cultivation after a considerable amount of work had been performed on it, and refuse

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1/ In 1937 the following clause appeared in a typical labor contract issued by the Mountain States Beet Growers Marketing Association: "It is mutually agreed between the parties hereto that $1.00 per acre shall be withheld from the payment for bunching and thinning, until after the crop has been harvested, as a guarantee of the faithful performance of the contract entered into by the contractor, if said contract covers the hand labor for the entire season, in connection with the production, cultivation and harvesting of the beets; it is provided, however, that if the contractor shall cease work before the completion of the contract, through no fault of his own, the contractor shall at the time of ceasing work, be paid in full for all labor actually performed, without any deduction whatever, Subject also to such proviso, it is agreed, if contract be made subsequent to bunching and thinning, that One Dollar (1.00) per acre shall be withheld from the payment for topping, as a guarantee of faithful performance of the contract entered into by the contractor." Cf. The Mountain States Beet Growers Marketing Association, Labor Contract, Contract for Hand Labor for the Season of 1937.

2/ Letter to M. A. Egloff from C. E. Hazard, Labor Relations Representative of the Farm Security Administration, Region X, on the subject of "Farm Labor Report," July 28, 1939.

to pay the workers for labor performed on such lands before their abandonment. An instance is reported where a family which had worked in a Michigan beet field was paid only $4 at the end of the season because the owner abandoned the field after it had been cultivated. Upon complaint, the State rechecked the acreage and was successful in recovering for this family a total of $456.[1/]

Abuses of wage payments, involving seasonal work in agriculture, have occurred in the berry and onion areas as well as in the beet fields of this State. Migratory berry pickers from Tennessee and onion harvest

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1/ Henry Pommerenck, Labor Relations Representative of the Farm Security Administration, Region II, "Report on the Sugar Beet Labor Situation in Several Areas of the State of Michigan Where Sugar Beets Are Grown," April 1939.

workers from Kentucky and Ohio have been swindled out of considerable amounts of wages.[1/]

In South Dakota, a number of farm laborers were forced to wait for their wages long periods after the 1938 harvest, until the farmers sold their grain to the elevators. In some cases these workers were unable to collect any of their wages.[2/]

A study by the National Child Labor Committee revealed that in Oregon and Washington hop growers withhold from ten to 25 percent of the wages of hop pickers, to be paid only if the worker stays until the end of the season.[3/] In paying wages to hop pickers, most growers use a ticket on which is punched or written indelibly the number of pounds in each bag weighed. Hop tickets are cashable at the company's commissary store, and pickers are expected to buy some supplies at the store. Failure to do that sometimes results in delay in the payment of wages. Commissary store prices when checked with those in town stores are reported to be almost always higher - some as much as 20 percent higher.[4/]

1/ From a report on movements of migratory workers into Michigan submitted by Henry Pommerenck, Labor Relations Representative of the Farm Security Administration in Region II, April 9, 1939.

2/ From a memorandum to members of the research staff of the Labor Relations Section of the Farm Security Administration, April 9, 1939, by Robert M. Cullum, Labor Relations Representative of the Farm Security Administration, Region VII.

3/ James E. Sidel, Pick for Your Supper, A Study of Child Labor Among Migrants on the Pacific Coast, National Child Labor Committee, June 1939, p. 17.

4/ Ibid.

Another investigation of about 250 migrant agricultural workers employed southern New Jersey during the summer of 1938, showed that in many cases wages were held back, in full or in part. The workers felt "this was done to force them to remain on the farm whether they were earning anything or not." The investigation also revealed that "for the most part the families were in debt for living expenses and had no choice but to remain until they could collect earnings and pay their bills." One family never received credit for picking 17 bushels of beans because the farmer "forgot" about it. Another family was "still trying in mid-October to collect $85 for day work done in June."[1/]

Some statistical evidence, showing the existence of wage payment and wage collection problems affecting farm labor, appears in the official reports of States in which agricultural workers have applied to the authorities for assistance in collecting unpaid wages. These figures, fragmentary as they are, suggest the extent to which the problem exists also in States which lack the means for aiding farm workers in collecting their earned wages. In California, for example, where the law regulating the collection of wages is probably more effective than that of any other State, the Department of Industrial Relations reported that during the biennial period ended June 30, 1932, about

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1/ National Child Labor Committee, A Summer in the Country, Publication No. 377, New York, March 1939, pp. 16-17.

1800 wage claimants in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas were agricultural workers.[1/]

In the State of Washington, the Department of Labor and Industries reported that 98 percent of the wage claims filed with the Division of Industrial Relations between 1932 and 1936 came from workers "in agricultural and small-operator employments."[2/] In Arkansas, where the Department of Labor has interpreted the term "wages" broadly enough to include complaints brought by sharecroppers,[3/] the Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported that about 200 claims, representing approximately $3,000, were filed by sharecroppers against landlords during the fiscal years 1934-1935 and 1935-1936. The Bureau was successful in adjusting 160 of these claims and in collecting $1,650. Many of the other claims were dismissed after it was found that the cropper had either signed a waiver of lien or had failed to

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1/ Of this number, 952 were farm hands, 74 were fruit pickers, 16 were fruit packers, 639 were gardeners and 132 were milkers. Cf. Biennial Report of the Department of Industrial Relations of the State of California, 1930-1932.

2/ Report of the Department of Labor and Industries, Washington, 1932-1936, p. 13.

3/ The rule that the sharecropper is an employee with no title to the crop until after there has been an actual division and the landlord has received his share and full payment for advances is followed in Arkansas, South Carolina and Georgia. Cf. A. B. Book, "A Note on the Legal Status of Share-Tenants and Share-Croppers in the South," in Law and Contemporary Problems, on the subject of Farm Tenancy, Duke University, October 1937, p. 545.

offer any evidence to off set the itemized account of the landlord.[1/]

In Utah, the Industrial Commission reported that during the fiscal years 1936 to 1938 "forty-four letters and numerous personal visits were received from agricultural laborers requesting the assistance of this department."[2/] However, no action was taken on these claims as employers and employees engaged in agricultural pursuits are exempt from the provisions of the State wage payment law.

1/ Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor and Statistics of the State of Arkansas, 1934-1936, p. 15.

2/ Report of the Industrial Commission of Utah, 1936-1938, Bulletin No. 5, p. 16.

C. Farm labor and wage payment laws.

It has been said that "unless pay days come at frequent intervals, their value to the employees is diminished because the employees will have drawn their money in advance, at a discount, and when pay days do occur there are no cash settlements to be made." 1/ Failure to pay wages regularly and at frequent intervals, therefore, results not only in the generally undesirable practice of withholding wages for considerable periods of time and in the piling up of claims for back wages, but also in substantially reducing the value of the wages received by the worker. For this reason, students of the subject agree that wage payment laws should contain a provision that employers must pay their workers wages earned semi-monthly. 2/

Several types of legal provisions exist upon whose effectiveness depends the regularity with which employees receive their wages. Among these, are laws requiring employers to pay wages on regular pay days designated in advance and occurring at least as often as an interval

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1/ U. S. Department of Labor, Division of Labor Standards, "Reasons for Drafting Suggested Language for Wage Payment and Wage Collection Law," (mimeographed) November 15, 1936, p. 3.

2/ See report of Committee on Wage Payment and Wage Collection in Reports of Committees and Resolutions Adopted by Third National Conference on Labor Legislation, Department of Labor, November 1936, p. 34.

specified in the law.[1] Many of the earlier laws requiring the payment of wages at specified periods apply only to certain corporations or to enumerated occupations, such as mining, quarrying, manufacturing, or transportation. In recent years, however, a tendency has been observed for such statutes to apply either to all occupations or to all corporations doing business in the given State.[2] But, generally, agricultural employments have not been included in this liberal trend of coverage.

Of the 44 States which have laws requiring certain classes of private employers to observe regular pay days,[3] only two - California and Massachusetts - apply to agricultural employers. In California, payment of wages is required to be made semi-monthly in all covered industries. In agriculture, viticulture, horticulture, stock and poultry raising and in all other farming occupations, wages are required to be paid monthly. In Massachusetts, where the time of payment generally provided is once a week, "employees in agricultural work" may be paid but once a month.[4]

1/ Other provisions are: (a) that payment of wages, in lawful money or in readily convertible checks, be made in full for services rendered up to pay day or that payment shall be made for services rendered up to and including a day not more than a specified number of days prior to pay day; and (b) that payment of wages be made to workers separated from the payroll, either voluntarily or by discharge, not later than a specified time.

2/ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Laws Requiring Payment of Wages at Specified Times," in Monthly Labor Review, December 1938. Also reprinted as Serial No. R855, p. 6.

3/ Three States - Florida, Idaho and Washington - and two jurisdictions - District of Columbia and the Philippine Islands - have no wage payment laws on their statute books. Also, the wage payment laws of Delaware and Hawaii apply only to public or quasi-public employees. Ibid., p.1.

4/ Ibid., footnote, p. 12.

The laws of nine other States, and Alaska and Puerto Rico, by providing all-inclusive coverage and by not specifically excluding employers engaged in farming, nominally cover farm workers. These States are:

Indiana	New Jersey	Pennsylvania
Minnesota	New York	Tennessee 1/
Nevada	Ohio 1/	West Virginia

In Indiana and New York the law provides for payment of wages once a week. But the law in Indiana is qualified by the phrase "if requested." The statutes of Nevada, Ohio and Tennessee require semi-monthly payment of wages, and the law of Pennsylvania has the same provision, "unless otherwise stipulated in the contract of hiring." Those of New Jersey and West Virginia specify that the time of payment shall be once every two weeks, 2/ and the Minnesota law provides for wage payment every fifteen days.

On the other hand, the wage payment laws of Georgia, Michigan, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wisconsin specifically exclude, among others, employers of workers engaged in agriculture. The law in Georgia covers "every person, firm or corporation... but not... farming." 3/ In Michigan and Montana the law includes "every employer of labor,

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1/ The law in Ohio limits the coverage to "every individual, firm, company, co-partnership, association or corporation doing business in the State employing five or more employees," and the Tennessee law limits the coverage to "all persons in concerns where five or more persons are employed, except public employments."

2/ In West Virginia the time of payment is once every two weeks for "every person, firm or corporation, except railroads." For workers on railroads a semi-monthly pay period is provided.

3/ Also excludes turpentine industries and sawmills.

except employers of farm labor."[1] In New Mexico the law covers "every employer except employers of workers... engaged in agriculture or in livestock industry."[2] The Utah law includes "all private employers, except those engaged in farm, dairy, agricultural, viticultural, or horticultural pursuits, or stock or poultry raising..."[3] In Wisconsin "every person, firm or corporation engaged in any enterprise or business for pecuniary profit" are covered by the law, with the exception of farm labor.[4]

The language of the wage payment laws of the remaining 27 States having such legislation, would seem to exclude, by and large, employers of farm workers. Thirteen of these States apply only to corporations,[5] and 14 do not include agricultural employments among the listed industries which are specifically covered.[6] Without an administrative interpretation, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not they apply

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1/ Also excludes domestic labor and employees of the State or any sub-division thereof.

2/ Also excludes employers of domestic labor in private homes.

3/ Also excludes banks, mercantile houses and domestic service.

4/ Also excludes hospitals or sanitariums, logging operations and domestic service.

5/ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota and Vermont.

6/ Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming.

to farm employers. Moreover, wage payment laws, as a group, are seldom effectively enforced, unless they are administered by the State labor departments. At present, it is not known which States have so authorized their labor departments.[1/]

1/ The Division of Labor Standards in the U.S. Department of Labor is now gathering this information.

D. Farm labor and wage collection laws.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that there is just as much reason to protect workers on farms against non-payment of wages as there is to protect other workers. In States in which the labor department is authorized by law to engage in wage collection activities and to settle wage claims as they arise, it is generally permitted to render this service for agricultural labor as well as for workers in other occupations. Unlike other types of farm labor legislation which, because of the inspection problem, are difficult to enforce, there is no hardship in making this type of law applicable to farm labor. A wage collection law is not "enforced" by inspection, but operates on complaint.1/

Wage earners, in general, and agricultural workers, in particular, usually have not the financial resources necessary to hire a lawyer and advance court costs to fight for the payment of their wages. For this reason, a feature of paramount importance in any wage collection law is the power given to the labor commissioner to take assignments for collection of unpaid wages - either through negotiation or through court action - without cost to the claimant. The aggrieved wage earner can then go

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1/ A wage collection law is not "enforced" according to the technical use of the term. Enforcement assumes the presence of compulsion upon the employer to comply with a specific standard. A wage collection law simply authorizes and instructs an administrative agency to assist workers in adjusting disputes over wage claims with their employers. In securing the prompt payment of claims, the enforcing agency may, in some cases, also utilize its power to enforce a wage payment law. The two types of legislation work together.

about his own affairs and, if necessary, leave the State in search of work elsewhere, secure in the knowledge that his claim is in competent hands, and that whatever legal steps are necessary will be taken for him. This is particularly important for seasonal agricultural workers who frequently do not have the means to remain in the immediate vicinity long enough to have their cases decided.

Wage collection laws, however, vary widely in their scope and enforceability, and the powers of the enforcing agency depend, among other things, upon the sources of legal authorization. In some States, labor offices have legal powers through specific wage collection laws. In others they handle wage claims under general authorization given them, or interpreted as given them, by acts creating their respective offices. In still others they assume this function by virtue of statutes relating to general wage payment or under provisions drawn from several laws. The States which have legal powers through specific wage collection laws usually provide for machinery to: (a) receive complaints and notify employers of such complaints; (b) hold hearings and adjust differences; (c) determine violations of the law; (d) take assignments of wage claims, and, if necessary, prosecute recalcitrant employers in the courts.

Nevertheless, as of July 1, 1939, only 15 States had specific wage collection laws empowering their labor commissioners with adequate authority to assist workers in collecting wages from recalcitrant employers.

These States were:

Arkansas	Michigan	New York
California	Nevada	Oregon
Illinois	New Hampshire	Utah
Indiana	New Jersey	Washington
Massachusetts	New Mexico	Wisconsin

In the States of Arkansas, New Jersey, New Hampshire and Utah the law authorizes the Commissioner of Labor to take assignments of wage claims, mechanics' and other liens of workers, not exceeding $200. The Wisconsin law fixes the limit at $100, and that of Indiana at less than $100. On the other hand, the wage collection laws of California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Washington do not set any limit.

A notable example of specific effective legislation on behalf of workers whose wages have been withheld is the provision of the California statute which empowers the labor commissioner of the State and his duly authorized representatives to take assignments of wage claims.[1/] It also authorizes them to prosecute action for the collection of wages, penalties, etc., of persons financially unable to employ counsel in cases in which, in the judgment of the State labor officials, the wage claims are valid and enforceable in the courts. These officials are delegated

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1/ The Labor Commissioner and his deputies and representatives authorized by him may take assignments of: (a) wage claims and incidental expense accounts and advances; (b) mechanics' and other liens of employees; (c) claims based on "stop orders" for wages and on bonds for labor; (d) claims for damages for misrepresentation of conditions of employment; (e) claims against employment agencies or their bondsmen; (f) claims for unreturned bond money of employees; and (g) claims for penalties for nonpayment of wages. Cf. California, Assignment of Wages, Labor Code, 1937, sections 96-101.

the power to issue subpoenas, compel the production of papers and records, to administer oaths, to examine witnesses under oath, and to take depositions and affidavits in order to carry out the provisions of the act.[1] During the two fiscal years ended June 30, 1932, the Division of Labor Statistics and Law Enforcement of that State collected over two million dollars in unpaid wages.[2] Practically all wage claims were collected without resort to court, and workers filing claims were saved time and earnings usually consumed in prolonged court procedure.

Most wage earners do not use established wage collection machinery because of their ignorance of the law. But the remote distance of the main or branch office of the State department of labor from the place of employment of an agricultural worker is a factor which discourages the settlement of wage claims through hearings and negotiation. For this reason two States - California and New York - have appointed deputy commissioners or inspectors to hold hearings on designated days in different parts of the State. California maintains labor commissioners who aid rural laborers to collect unpaid wages, just as they aid urban workers.[3] In the State of New York, workers

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1/ Ibid.

2/ Biennial Report of the Department of Industrial Relations of the State of California, 1930-1932.

3/ Paul S. Taylor and Tom Vasey, "Contemporary Background of California Farm Labor," in Rural Sociology Journal, Vol. I, No. 4, 1936.

may file their wage claims not only in the branch offices of the department of labor, but also in many county offices, and with sheriffs and justices of the peace who are provided with the department's printed form.[1/]

1/ "Work of State Labor Offices in Behalf of Wage Claimants," Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Monthly Labor Review, October 1933. Reprinted as Serial No. R39, p. 8.

E. Suggested model wage payment and wage collection law.

The foregoing review of State wage payment and wage collection laws indicates that protection afforded wage earners, generally, and agricultural workers, particularly, under these laws is, for the most part, non-existent or inadequate. Only a few States specifically or nominally include farm workers in the operation of wage payment laws. In a large majority of the States the labor department is still without authority to assist workers in collecting unpaid wages.

It was to be expected, therefore, that the question of developing proper types of legislative remedy for the prevailing wage payment abuses and for the existing inadequate machinery for the collection of unpaid wages should have come up for discussion in the Second National Conference on Labor Legislation held in 1935. Accordingly, a committee of State labor commissioners was appointed by the Secretary of Labor,[1/] charged with the task of preparing a draft of a model bill for State wage payment and wage collection laws.[2/] The standards embodied in this draft were to serve as minimum standards intended for those States in which these requirements did not exist.

The model wage payment and wage collection bill which the committee drafted received the endorsement of the Third Conference on

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1/ The Secretary's committee was subsequently combined with a committee appointed by the president of the International Association of Governmental Labor Officials.

2/ The main features of the California law, in particular, were incorporated in the model draft.

Labor Legislation in 1936, of the International Association of Governmental Labor Officials at its 1936 annual convention, and of the American Federation of Labor and of Labor's Non-Partisan League. The bill contained the following unwaiverable provisions regarding non-payment of wages:[1/]

1. "Every person, firm, partnership, association, corporation, receiver or other officer of a court of the State, or any agent or officer of any of the above-mentioned classes, and employing any person in the State," were to be covered;

2. Employer was to be liable to the employees of his subcontractors;

3. Employer was to pay his workers wages earned semi-monthly, on days to be designated in advance by the employer as the regular pay days;

4. Workers were to be notified of time and place of payment and of their rate of wages and were to be paid in full, in lawful money, or bank checks convertible into cash at full face value; and

5. Workers discharged were to be paid within 24 hours, and those quitting voluntarily were to be paid within 72 hours. In the event of suspension of work due to an industrial dispute, wages were to be paid at next regular pay day.

The objects of the above provisions are (a) to bring about payment of wages, in full, on regular pay days known to all employees, at intervals that were sufficiently close together to enable wage earners to live on a cash rather than a credit basis; and (b) to insure prompt payment of workers separated from the payroll in order that they may be free to look for other jobs.

1/ Department of Labor, Division of Labor Standards, "Language for State Wage Payment and Wage Collection Law,"(mimeographed), November 15, 1936.

The model bill also included the following unwaiverable provisions respecting collection of wages, the object of which is to make available for the wage earner, without cost, judicial machinery for the collection of wage claims, liens and accrued penalties: 1/

1. To empower the labor commissioner to hold hearings on wage collection cases and thus create an opportunity for the settlement of disputes without court action;

2. To authorize and instruct the labor commissioner to cooperate with any employee in the enforcement of any just and valid claim against an employer or contractor to the end that he may take assignments of wage claims, mechanics' and other workers' liens, not exceeding $200 per claim; and

3. To empower the labor commissioner to prosecute all necessary actions to collect, without having to advance court costs or give bond or security.

1/ Ibid.